

The Chesnut tree, called the Four Sisters, from its four branching stems closely combined in one massive trunk, stands in the Heronry, in the finely-wooded park at Cobham Hall, the ancient seat of the illustrious family of that name, so well known in English History, and now the property of John fourth Earl of Darley. It is the noble remains of a most magnificent tree; and though its head has paid forfeit to the "skye" influences" and a long succession of revolving seasons, yet it is not left entirely stripped of ornament in its old age; as a number of tender shoots spring out of its topmost branches, and still give it, by the lightness of their foliage, an appearance of freshness, of which its aged trunk would almost forbid the expectation. It is thirty-five feet two inches in circumference at the ground, avoiding the spurs; twenty-nine feet at three feet from the ground; thirty-three feet at twelve feet from the ground; and forty feet at the point where the trunk divides.

PLATE XIV.—THE BEECH TREE AT KNOLE.

THERE is no tree with which more classical and pleasing associations are connected than the Beech; the very mention of it recalls Virgil's

*"Tityre, tu patula recubans sub tegmine fagi
Silvestrem tenui Musam meditaris avena;"*

and a thousand images of rural life, of rustic lovers carving their mistresses' name on its silver bark, of tuneful shepherds disputing for bowls of its wood, valued, when curiously carved, almost as much as if of precious metal, all spring into the imagination.

The Beech, however, has more solid claims on admiration than those which merely affect the fancy. It is a valuable as well as a beautiful tree; for though its wood, on account of being exceedingly subject to be worm-eaten, is not so fit as the Elm or Walnut for purposes where durability is requisite, it is yet much used for household furniture, and instruments of husbandry, and, when kept under water, is little inferior in ship-building to the Elm itself. The Beech will grow in the most stony and barren soils; and, as a shelter in exposed situations, it is particularly desirable, on account of retaining its glittering leaves till the very end of autumn, and, indeed, many of them throughout the winter;—changing their delicate green for the more appropriate red. In the spring, its foliage, feathering almost to the ground, is exquisitely beautiful; and its fantastic roots, immortalized by Gray, in his celebrated Elegy, are frequently covered with wild flowers. Swine, deer, and the smaller quadrupeds, tenants of the hollow trees—such as the squirrel, mouse, and dormouse, greedily fatten upon its mast, which is likewise capable of being converted into bread and oil for the human race; and its leaves afford the most agreeable mattresses, continuing sweet and tender for seven or eight years together, and are eulogized by Evelyn, from his own experience, for their refreshing softness. It must, however, be acknowledged, that its shades are more favourable to the traveller and the shepherd than to corn or grass; and that it is of that encroaching and dominant nature, that a wood which may be originally in equal proportions of Oak and Beech, will in course of time become entirely beechen.

The Park at Knole, in Kent, the magnificent seat of the Duchess Dowager of Dorset and Earl Whitworth, abounds in fine Beeches, of which the one represented in the accompanying plate is a noble specimen. Its "limbs of giant mould" start from the parent trunk in rival greatness, and give it the appearance of a lofty structure of clustering pillars raised by the genii of the wood—a fit residence for some sylvan deity.

The circumference of this fine tree, at three feet from the ground, is twenty-four feet; at ten feet it is twenty-seven. It rises to the height of one hundred and five feet; in extent of boughs is one hundred and twenty-three, and contains four hundred and ninety-eight feet of solid timber.

PLATE XV.—THE MOOR PARK LIME TREE.

THE Lime Tree, or Linden, is said to have been introduced into England from Germany in the reign of Elizabeth, by Sir John Spelman, to whom we are also indebted for the introduction of the manufactory of paper.